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Research Study

Whither Argentina: New Political System or More of the Same?

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WHITHER ARGENTINA: NEW POLITICAL SYSTEM OR MORE OF THE SAME?

by

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NOTE: This study was prepared by the Office of Political Research. Other agencies and CIA offices were consulted, but the study has not been formally coordinated and does not represent an official CIA position. The issuing office is aware that the complex matters discussed lend themselves to other interpretations. Comments on the paper will be welcomed by the author, who may be reached [redacted]

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- SUMMARY -

WHITHER ARGENTINA: NEW POLITICAL SYSTEM OR MORE OF THE SAME?

Argentina seems on the verge of repeating a familiar political cycle: an elected civilian government is falling into lower and lower repute as it is progressively overwhelmed by problems of its own making and by political and economic dilemmas that have remained unsolved for the last forty years. In the wings a divided and reluctant armed forces is being propelled to take over the government again. Locked in an immobilism of their own making, Argentine political forces have been unable to break this political cycle in which the military intervenes to take power from an ineffectual civilian government, only to give it back when they cannot govern effectively either.

The immobilization of the Argentine system has two underlying dimensions. Politically, the basic deficiency is a lack of respected institutions through which conflicts among groups can be mediated. Thus, the efforts of any one group to stimulate major political change are quickly cancelled out by the opposition of competing groups. On the economic side no group has had sufficient strength to take the measures necessary to revitalize a stagnant economy. For decades two or three years of slight or moderate growth have been followed by one or more disastrous years in which the previous increment of growth is wiped out.

This time, however, Argentine politics may not repeat itself. The argument of this paper is that there are new forces loose in the Argentine society which have so undermined the traditional institutions and processes that a basic change in the political system is likely to occur in the next one to three years.

These new forces are both political and economic, and their effect is to erode the consensus that allowed the traditional system to function. This consensus rested on respect for two implicit rules of Argentine politics:

-- violence was permissable to express grievances and show strength, but only if carefully limited.

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-- No political group sought the total elimination of any other (i.e. any defeat was perceived as only a temporary setback).

These rules prevailed because no group was afraid, hungry or angry enough to challenge them. None had as much political power or economic wealth as it wanted, but each was comfortable enough to avoid taking the chance of losing permanently what it did have.

Since about 1970 this common understanding of how politics should be played has been threatened by the rise of guerrilla/terrorist groups which disregard the rules of limiting violence and of not seeking to eliminate other power contenders. Violence has changed in kind and intensity. Where once strikes and demonstrations were the common occurrence, these have now been supplanted by kidnappings, assassinations, bombings, and armed attacks. Loss of life from political violence has risen dramatically from an average of 40 deaths per year during 1967-72 to over 1,000 in 1975.

The breakdown in political rules is now being exacerbated by the most virulent inflation Argentina has ever experienced. Prices rose 335 percent in 1975 compared with an average yearly rise of 30 percent during 1967-74. The effect has been to intensify the pursuit of narrow sectoral interests by Argentine political and economic groups. Particularly in the labor sector, fear is growing that the old methods will not suffice to protect the working class' share of the Argentine economic pie. Militancy is rapidly increasing as unemployment grows and real wages decline. And the Army and security forces are being brought in to break up strikes declared "illegal" and" subversive" by the government.

What is the probable outcome of the sharp, upward spiral in political violence and increasing perceptions of economic disaster? One possibility is for the old system of political immobilism to continue. Another is for civil war. Neither of these alternatives seems very likely.

Preservation of the old system for more than another year or so depends on the re-establishment of the old political rules and the minimum consensus that used to exist. But the likelihood of this seems increasingly doubtful. As violence by both the left and right increases, the previously respected norms on expected treatment of political opponents seem likely to

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erode further. Moreover, there is little prospect that the old consensus can be revived unless the economy can be stabilized. This cannot be done, however, without a severe austerity program which would be almost certain to hurt organized labor's economic position and further undermine its faith in the old system.

The odds for civil war are greater than for the indefinite continuation of political immobilism. More turmoil is likely since the strength of the guerrilla/terrorists is growing and greater labor militancy is developing, especially at the local union level. But sustained internal war is not likely unless the Armed Forces stand aside or split into warring factions -- neither of which seems in the cards at this point.

Indeed, the most probable course of events is for the spiral of increasing political violence and economic breakdown to lead to an indefinite takeover of the government by the Army. This time the rule of the Army would likely be much harsher and more authoritarian than any time in the past because:

-- The Argentine society will be much closer to anarchy than on any previous occasion of Army intervention and, hence, the measures to restore order and stimulate economic recovery will have to be much more severe in order to succeed.

-- The limits on using violence will have largely disappeared, so that the Army will be less inhibited by cultural constraints from forcibly suppressing any political opposition.

Up to now the Army has lacked the unity of will and purpose to use force to restructure the Argentine political system. It has always been a loose assemblage of highly politicized factions which formed short-lived coalitions to remove ineffectual civilian leaders but which generally began to fall apart after taking over direction of the government. Past factionalism in the Army may be about to give way to a new unity, however.

The evidence is uncertain but there are indications that a new "hardline" mentality is growing among many military officers, particularly those who have fought the guerrillas.

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These officers are reported to feel that the guerrillas, and the social and economic conditions that spawn them, can only be eliminated by a total change in the existing political and economic system.

While this mentality may be spreading as officers who have fought guerrillas are rotated outside the combat zone, it apparently has not yet reached the high command level. The top Army leadership still remains reluctant to take power directly because of the immensity of the problems they would face and their memories of the frustrations of past military rule. They are hoping that, if they must take power again, they can do so on a wave of popular support that will enable them to govern without major opposition.

This time, however, it seems increasingly unlikely that the Generals could rule benignly for long. The most likely scenario is that they will take power again with the superficial backing of a wide spectrum of political forces but that political and economic problems have assumed such proportions that partial and patchwork solutions simply will not hold. Thus, either they will eventually be forced to respond by imposing severe authoritarian rule themselves, or a rising generation of Argentine Army officers, increasingly unfettered by the constraints and divisions of the past, will impose it in their place.

In short, basic and far-reaching changes seem likely in Argentina. To monitor these (and their implications for US interests) will require increased scrutiny of the attitudes of Argentine military officers at the middle as well as the top ranks.

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THE DISCUSSION

I. INTRODUCTION

For twenty years (ever since the overthrow of Juan Peron in 1955) Argentina has stagnated both politically and economically. Whether ruled by civilians or the military it has known only brief periods of political calm or economic growth. Elected civilian regimes have alternated in office with coup-installed military governments, and both have ruled with equal ineffectiveness.

Argentina seems on the verge of the same charade that has been played out twice since 1955: an elected civilian government is falling into lower and lower repute as it is progressively overwhelmed by problems of its own making and by political and economic dilemmas that have remained unsolved for the last forty years. In the wings is a divided Armed Forces, being propelled by events to again take over the government, yet unwilling to be pulled into another no-win situation: i.e., because it has neither the strength nor the will to govern decisively, it will reign but not rule.

This time, however, Argentine politics may not repeat itself. The argument of this paper is that there are new forces at loose in the Argentine society that have so undermined the traditional institutions and processes which have set the boundaries for past politics that a basic change in the Argentine political system is likely to occur in the next one to three years. This paper will (1) describe the political forces and rules-of-behavior which characterized the crumbling old system, (2) outline the evidence which suggests that change is underway, and (3) speculate about what new political system may rise out of the debris of the old.

II. THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM

On the surface the Argentine political system appears to change each time an elected civilian government is removed in favor of an authoritarian military regime. In actuality, until very recently, the political forces, the rules that govern their behavior, and the issues over which they have struggled have changed hardly at all.

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Argentina has been the epitome of Samuel Huntington's "praetorian society." In such a society all major social forces are highly politicized. Groups oppose each other directly on a wide range of basic issues since there are no respected political institutions through which their conflicts can be mediated. Furthermore, there are no generally accepted means for resolving differences; each group tends to use the "coin" which makes maximum use of the resources most available to it. "The wealthy bribe; students riot; workers strike; mobs demonstrate; and the military coup."*

In the Argentine setting the two most powerful forces, and the only ones capable of taking significant political initiatives, have long been the military and the Peronist movement. They have been the crucial actors for several decades and their relationship is the pivot around which most of Argentina's politics have turned since 1955.

A. The Military

Argentina's Army (the primary military political actor) was modeled deliberately after the Prussian Army with its strong emphasis that the military should function as a professional, apolitical guardian of society's institutions. Yet almost simultaneously with the professionalization of the Argentine Army it also became one of the most politicized armies in Latin America. These two processes are opposites. One tends to orient the loyalties of the officer corps towards the military as an independent institution. The other pulls loyalties towards individual politicians or political parties and involves the officer corps in factional politics. The effect of these countervailing pressures has been to create tensions in individual officers and in the corps as a whole.

These tensions have been present within the Army throughout the 20th century and underlie much of the ambivalence that the Army high command has demonstrated as to whether it should or should not be directly involved in running the country. The political pattern that has consequently developed has been fairly consistent. The pattern begins with an already factionalized

*Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968) p. 196.

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Army in which some officers have close personal and party ties with various middle or upper class party leaders. Most of the others are generally apolitical but are quite susceptible to being led by officers who feel strongly about professional or political issues. On numerous occasions over the last several decades this existing disunity has been exacerbated by the deliberate efforts of elected civilian Presidents to develop a secure political base in the military by manipulating military promotions and assignments in order to reward followers and punish critics. In almost every case a counter-reaction has then set in, and a movement to re-establish military professionalism and to remove the Army from politics burgeons. Eventually, an ad hoc coalition is formed between those wanting the Army to return to the barracks and those whose careers have been adversely affected by the political maneuvers of the President, and the President is removed from office by a temporarily united Army. A military government is next installed. Direct involvement in ruling the country, rather than unifying the Army, results in even greater deterioration of professional norms. Eventually, a groundswell develops within the military to return the government to elected civilian rule in the vain hope that the military can, once again, get out of politics and find a unifying professional identity.*

*This was the pattern that occurred when the military took power in 1955 from Juan Peron and then gave way to elected civilian President Arturo Frondizi in 1958. Similarly, Frondizi was overthrown in 1962 but the Army, after briefly ruling through his constitutional successor as a puppet President, permitted the election of Arturo Illia in 1963. Next, it forced Illia from office in 1966 but, after seven years of indecisive military rule, allowed elections and the return to the Presidency of Peron in 1973.

The dilemma of the Argentine professional soldier is best captured in a communique issued by the Army Secretary of War in April 1966 when the "legalists" in the Army were struggling with self doubts over whether to remove Illia and subject the military to the divisive pressures of governing: "The Army... makes known to public opinion...that it does not believe in 'military government' as a solution for Argentine problems...that experience has demonstrated that the Army, in the function of government, is converted into a deliberative body and discipline is corrupted, which leads to anarchy destroying what so much vigilance and sacrifice have cost the institution."

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Since 1955 the tension between politicization and professionalization has been complicated by another basic division within the military about what to do with the Peronist movement. Although the Army has been generally anti-Peron throughout this period, two major factions have continued to dispute the issue. One group has believed that Peronism must be eradicated entirely for the country to regain its political health. This group has tended to coincide with those officers who believe that the military should take over the government indefinitely and impose harsh rule. The other, more broadly-based and influential group, has also been against Peronism as a movement but has supported the re-integration of individual Peronists into the political process in order to defuse them as a unified, populist political force. It has also generally supported the return of the government to civilian hands after a period of "cleansing." Most recently, this group came to believe that the only salvation of the Argentine society and, especially, the military as an institution would be to remove itself from power and let a chastened and aged Juan Peron take office, hoping that the responsibilities and pressures of power might cause the Peronist movement either to destroy or reform itself. This feeling led to the Army's withdrawal from politics and the return to power of Peron in 1973.

In summary, the Army as a political actor is most accurately seen as a loose assemblage of interest groups which come together in short-lived coalitions on occasion to overthrow ineffectual national leadership but which almost always begins to fall apart as soon as it takes over the government.

B. The Peronists

The most important of the other political forces in Agentina is the Peronist movement. Like every other group in Argentina it has always been faction-ridden. The movement itself can only be defined very imprecisely as an aggregate which, after Peron's overthrow in 1955, was unified primarily by the demand that he, or those purportedly associated with him, be returned to political power. In total strength its adherents have numbered from about one-fifth to one-half of adult Argentines, with the exact number depending on the issue in dispute. The one issue that has best served to unite Peronists has been their determination to keep the advances in economic well-being and status they made under Peron and to resist being made the sacrificial lambs of any government program, whether civilian or military,

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to reinvigorate the stagnant economy. Their power lies in their control of the labor movement. Over the last two decades the trade union sector, based on the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) with a total affiliation of over three million workers, developed a reasonably efficient and well financed bureaucratic structure. As befits a powerful, well-entrenched movement, it has not been revolutionary or radical in orientation, but rather has usually pursued bread-and-butter union issues. And, although the economy has stagnated for twenty years, union leaders have generally succeeded in keeping wages up and the prices down of items most critical to workers' welfare (such as wheat and beef).

C. Other Political Forces

For the purposes of this essay the other major traditional political forces can be mentioned very briefly. One set of these forces comes from a fairly highly developed middle class and consists of commercial interests associated with the export economy, native industrialists, professional politicians, and government civil servants. Some are more organized than others, but the interests of these groups are often diverse and in conflict. In most cases the influence of these forces on the political system has been narrowly directed to the defense of the interests of their own particular group, and they have demonstrated little ability, unlike the military and Peronists, to affect the system as a whole.

The conservative rural oligarchy is the final sector worth noting. It has little organized national political expression but has, when defending its own interests, considerable political power. Its influence comes from its control over the production of Argentina's two major exports, grain and beef, and through personal ties with important government and military leaders.

D. The Traditional Political Culture

Despite appearances to the contrary the Argentine political system, at the level of basic institutions, political forces, and the rules by which politics is played, has been remarkably consistent and stable, at least until recently. It can essentially be described as a veto system in which all political actors or forces follow these basic rules:

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1. No single political force is strong enough to impose its will permanently on the others.

2. Each is strong enough to block the major political initiatives of the other, and

3. There is no commonly accepted basis for the formation of governing coalitions although temporary coalitions to overthrow the government-of-the-moment can be formed.

These rules work (if only to prevent efficient government) because they are imbedded in a commonly shared political culture in which each of the actors subscribes to basically the same values and expectations of behavior. The most important elements of this common culture are the following:

1. Political institutions have not modernized as rapidly as economic institutions so that the two systems are increasingly incongruent. The economic system demands that the citizen respond in a highly rational and functional manner. In contrast, in the political sphere the citizen responds in a much more particularistic way and "national" interest is defined in a very narrow manner, usually encompassing the welfare of only the specific group making the definition. Each group tends to believe that improvements in economic and political benefits cannot be mutual: what other groups gain, it must lose.

2. Limited violence has become institutionalized as a legitimate method of expressing grievances or bringing about political change. Because of the weakness of political institutions for managing change "...the component elements of the power elite in Argentina -- such as officers, officials, and party leaders -- are prepared to press their disagreements to a point that calls for a show of force, or even a limited use of force, instead of relying on mutual consent that is achieved after peaceful persuasion."*

*Jeane Kirkpatrick, Leader and Vanguard in Mass Society: A Study of Peronist Argentina (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1971) p. 93.

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The amount of violence that is permitted under the rules of the game has generally had very definite limits, however. It has also been highly stylized, particularly on the part of the military, and has led to little bloodshed. These limits are clearly evident in the recent abortive rebellion of a portion of the Argentine Air Force and the way in which it was put down: threats to bomb each side into submission were uttered but actual bombing and strafing runs were made only on runways and other unoccupied areas.

3. A final point is that for most of modern Argentine history a common understanding has existed that no political force will seek permanently to eliminate any other political force.* Peronist, military, oligarchy or middle class, each group has believed that a culture in which political defeat is perceived as only temporary best serves its own interests since it can never be sure of being on the winning side of the resolution of any particular issue. Nor has any group, because of factionalism in its ranks and the power of other groups, ever been confident it could win in a terminal struggle. Finally, even while the Argentine economy has stumbled along, it has been beneficent enough to give every important group at least a good part of what it wants. In essence then, until very recently, no group has been afraid, hungry, or angry enough to take the chance of losing permanently what it already has.

* This is commonly the rule in traditional Latin American political systems. Charles W. Anderson, Politics and Economic Change in Latin America (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1967) pp. 104-106.

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III. THE FORCES OF CHANGE

A. New Political Forces

Since about 1970, new political forces have developed on the left which pose a serious threat to the continued functioning of the old political system. These forces exist mainly as rural guerrillas/urban terrorists, but they also have some expression in organized political party groupings, in the student movement and, most recently, at the local level in organized labor.

The first signs of Argentine participation in guerrilla/terrorist activities appeared in the late 1950's and, especially, in the early 1960's when two Marxist groups sent members to Cuba for training. Then, in 1966, a Trotskyite party, the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), began to sponsor bank robberies and kidnappings, primarily to secure financing. By 1970 the PRT spawned a faction calling itself the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), which launched a sustained guerrilla campaign, especially in Tucuman Province. While ERP fortunes have fluctuated considerably since 1970, it has remained steadfastly dedicated to the violent overthrow of the government and the imposition of a Marxist revolutionary political system. It held to this position even when the supposed worker's hero, Juan Peron, returned to power in 1973.

The other major current of guerrilla/terrorist activity has been sponsored by radical Peronists. As previously noted, the Peronist movement has always had factions of varying colorations, but the polarization into moderate and radical camps accelerated greatly with the return of Juan Peron to power in 1973. After his return as President, Peron took generally conservative positions on most important political and economic issues. Most old-line, labor-oriented Peronist leaders responded favorably to this conservatism, but many of the younger leaders who were associated with the youth and student sector were severely disillusioned. They reacted in traditional Peronist fashion by assassinating selected conservative Peronist leaders, but they did not directly attack the government. This changed in September 1974 after Mrs. Peron took office, following her husband's death, and showed herself to be even more conservative than he. The radical Peronists broke with her, went underground as the Montoneros terrorist movement, and began a violent campaign against the political establishment and, especially, against the police.

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B. Effect on Established Political Forces

The existence of active and often successful forces engaged in political terrorism has had a heavy impact on most other Argentine political forces. The effect on the military has been at least three-fold. First, it has created some degree of unity in the officer corps. The Army, which has not fought a war in over 100 years, is now engaged in combat against an enemy which the Armed Forces high command has declared must be exterminated. Secondly, combatting the guerrillas in the countryside and the terrorists in the city has inexorably dragged the military deeper into politics. Extraordinary powers were given to the Armed Forces by Anti-Subversion laws, an expanded National Defense law, and a State of Siege, all declared by the congress in 1974 and 1975. And in Tucuman Province the Army has taken some civil as well as military powers as it attemps to destroy the ERA. All this has served to heighten the ever present tension between professionalization and politicization: a growing number of military men believe Mrs. Peron must be replaced by an administration, if necessary military controlled, capable of giving Argentina law and order. Other officers, particularly those in the high command who have the freshest memories of the frustrations of past military rule, are desperate to keep the Army at least one step removed from direct control of government.

A third military reaction to the existence of new guerrilla/terrorist political forces has been the growth of a "hardline" political mentality among some officers. [redacted] These officers, [redacted] are beginning to feel that both the guerrillas and the social and economic conditions that spawn them can only be eliminated by a total change in the political and economic system. They have grown to despise the civilian politicians (and even some of the military leaders associated with them) who run the corrupt old system. This, of course, is parallel to the attitudinal change which many Brazilian, Peruvian and Chilean officers underwent prior to deciding that only the military can govern effectively and that national defense and national development are inextricably linked.

The Peronist movement has also been deeply influenced by the emergence of the new radical left political forces. In part the

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effect has been even more direct than on the military since the Montoneros terrorists are formerly loyal Peronists who are now in violent opposition to a Peronist administration. The existence of this alternate pole of attraction for Peronists seems to be contributing to the breakup of the movement as an even vaguely unified political force. The split appears to be three-way. One ever-diminishing faction remains loyal to Mrs. Peron. It no longer controls a majority in the congress and it is rapidly lósing control over the all-important base of the Peronist movement, the trade union structure. A second faction, also politically conservative, wants Mrs. Peron to step down in order to save Peronism. It has strength at the national level in both the labor union movement and Justicialista (Peronist) Party. The third grouping is composed of radicalized workers who formerly supported the Peronist movement but now seem increasingly attracted to the Montoneros cause. Their influence is showing at the local union level, where wide-spread strikes are breaking out that the once-dominant national labor leadership seems unable to control.

C. The Changing Political Culture

One of the major consequences of the emergence of the guerrilla/terrorists and their associated political allies as important actors on the Argentine political stage is that the values that underlay the behavior of the traditional political forces and the stability of the established system are undergoing serious challenge. The challenge threatens to undermine the old system and cause its breakdown.

This change in values and the erosion of the former implicit agreement on acceptable political behavior are most clearly demonstrated in two areas. First, the previously accepted limitations on political violence seem to have been permanently breached. Secondly, the unspoken agreement that defeat is only temporary and that no political group should seek the final elimination of any other group appears to have broken down.

Political violence in Argentina has changed in the last few years in both kind and intensity. Where once strikes and demonstrations were the common occurrence, these have now been supplanted by kidnappings, assassinations, bombings, and armed attacks

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The change along the second dimension -- that actors seek to dominate but not eliminate other actors -- is most clearly seen in the attitudes of the guerrilla/terrorists and in the feelings that seem to be evolving in a large part of the Army and security services. The ERP and the Montoneros are both dedicated to the violent overthrow of the current "bourgeois" democratic system and its replacement by a radical authoritarian form of government. At the moment, in pursuit of this goal, the ERP is concentrating on assassination of military officers and the disruption of the Army as an institution while the Montoneros are directing a large part of their terrorist activity at the police and other security officials.

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The Army is responding to this threat with corresponding brutality. As one headline expressed it, "Guerrillas in Argentina Battle Army in a War Without Prisoners." Torture, battlefield "justice," a fuzzing of the distinction between active guerrilla and civilian supporter, the use of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, and the support of right-wing "death" squads have all been noted as increasingly common Army (and police) tactics. As more and more military and police are exposed to the notion that all means are justified in order to eliminate subversion and the threat to the state posed by the guerrilla/terrorists, the previously obeyed norms on expected treatment of political opponents seem likely to erode further.

A change in attitude and values, less obvious than that occurring because of the conflict between the guerrilla/terrorists and the Army, may also be taking place in the labor sector. The once-hierarchical trade union movement seems to be breaking apart, primarily because of increasing doubts on the part of many workers that, in the face of the worst inflation in Argentina's history, their national leadership can adequately protect their economic interests. Unauthorized local strikes are taking place with increasing frequency which protest both economic grievances and what local union members perceive as a lack of responsiveness to labor's needs on the part of an unrepresentative and self-perpetuating clique of national union leaders.

Labor's problems will probably worsen for at least the next year. Inflation soared to 335 percent in 1975 (the highest in the world) from an average of about 30 percent yearly during 1967-74. Meanwhile, in 1975 wages rose 150-175 percent at the most and unemployment climbed steeply from negligible levels to over six percent. Massive wage increases, the tool traditionally used by Argentine labor to keep real wages up, will only accelerate the deterioration of the economy by feeding inflation. Moreover, severe political infighting is occurring among national trade union leaders (some want Mrs. Peron to step down, some do not) which will weaken the ability of the labor movement to act as a coherent pressure group in making both economic and political demands. The probable result of these trends is that the fragmentation of the labor movement will grow and some workers, particularly those exposed to reported penetration of local unions by the Montoneros, will resort to increasingly desperate and violent measures to attempt to protect their interests.

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Labor strife and the spectre of uncontrollable agitation is causing a hardening of attitudes towards unionized workers among the military and security services, both of which have recently been involved in breaking strikes declared "illegal" and "subversive" by the government. Generally opposed to Peronism as a political movement, a growing number of officers are beginning to perceive workers and even their "normal" economic demands as a threat to national security which must be suppressed. One Argentine general is quoted as having said that "In order to save 20 million Argentines from socialism, it may be necessary to sacrifice 50,000 lives."

Confrontation between labor and the military has occurred in the past, most notably in 1969-70 during the military regime of General Onganía. In order to bring Argentina's political and economic problems under control, Onganía, when he took office in 1966, attempted to establish authoritarian controls on the political system by closing congress and suspending all political parties. He also tried, with considerable initial success, to impose an austerity program on the economy by, among other things, a temporary wage freeze. In late 1967 and 1968 the economy began to recover and, although real wages declined through this period, strikes and demonstrations were few and only partially successful because the labor movement was divided about to what extent it should cooperate with government. In May 1969, however, serious disorders broke out. There was a general strike on 30th May which led to a violent confrontation with the police in which 20-30 people were killed. Onganía responded to the labor agitation by suspending some unions, intervening and reorganizing the CGT to place it under government control, and declaring a state of emergency. At this critical juncture, however, he faced a united labor movement under Peronist control but had at his back a divided Army which would not support his authoritarian policies if that meant violently suppressing organized labor and other political opposition. By October 1969 the Onganía government began to grant massive wage increases and a general strike called in November by a supposedly government-controlled CGT was 75 percent successful. Erosion of the stabilization program continued through 1970 and by early 1971 control over the country's economic problems had been lost.

The old veto system continued to function under Onganía and prevented him from holding to effective policy initiatives in major part because the consensus on how to play

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politics prevailed. That consensus was minimal in that it prescribed what behavior to avoid -- unlimited violence and the total elimination of one's opponent -- rather than general agreement on what procedures and institutions to use to resolve conflict. Now, however, under the impact of the emergence of new political forces uncommitted to past political values and whose grievances are directed at the traditional political system and not just the way it functions, even that "negative" commitment appears to be dissolving. Thus, there is a strong possibility that the old veto system itself may soon breakdown.

IV. THE FUTURE

The fact that a political culture is probably changing and that new political forces are entering the scene does not lead immediately to conclusions about when a change in the political system may occur or what form the new system may take. Certainly, the overt political emphasis in Argentina today is to make the old system last one day longer by finding some "constitutional" way of persuading Mrs. Peron to step down in favor of a legal successor. The top Army leadership still remains extremely reluctant to take power directly. If economic and political conditions deteriorate further and the military is forced to step in, the top command hopes that Mrs. Peron and her cronies in government will have so discredited themselves that the military will be able to take over on a wave of broad public (including labor) support. In short, there are no indications the current top military leadership has plans to radically restructure the political system in order to end the political and economic immobilism to which the old veto system had led.

How long can the old system persist, with or without the military in power? Its continued functioning for more than another year or so depends on the re-establishment of the old political rules and the minimum consensus that used to exist. The likelihood of this seems increasingly doubtful. As violence by both the left and the right grows, the previously respected norms on expected treatment of political opponents seem likely to erode further. In addition the economic and political issues now demanding resolution are becoming so intensely felt that they cannot be temporized for long. Important social and political forces -- workers, businessmen, the military and security services -- are being injured to a degree never experienced before.

The dilemma for the old political system is that dealing effectively with these issues -- ranging from hyper-inflation to the

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threat of anarchy from the guerrilla/terrorists -- will take severe measures which will also hurt powerful groups. No government, civilian or military, functioning within the present system has either the political muscle or institutional strength to overcome the veto of those political forces who would have to make the sacrifices necessary to resolve Argentina's problems. Nor is there much hope that the particularistic political culture will disappear overnight so that labor, business, government workers, professional politicians, agricultural interests and other important groups can be persuaded voluntarily to make the essential sacrifices in the name of some higher national interest.

One possible outcome of the spiral of increasing political violence and economic breakdown is civil war. The odds for this are greater than for the indefinite continuation of political immobilism, but internal war is still not the most likely outcome of the current situation. The guerrilla/terrorists have probably not reached the peak of their potential to wreak havoc, especially if they continue to infiltrate and gain sympathizers in the labor movement. This increases the likelihood of higher levels of turmoil as work stoppages and demonstrations spread at the local union level. Simultaneously, however, greater militancy at the local level is contributing to the splintering of the Peronist movement, and it is losing whatever tenuous unity it had as a national political force. It is doubtful the guerrilla/terrorists could spark a civil war unless (1) they draw widespread support from moderate as well as radical Peronists and the Army stands aside, or (2) the military itself splits into warring factions. Neither of these developments seems likely at this point.

Rather than continuation of the status quo or civil war it seems more likely that the sense of desperation developing among Argentine political forces will propel one of them to overcome its past factionalism and to seize power in order to attempt to impose its will on the society. There are three groups that theoretically have the capability to seize power and suppress opposition: the Peronists, the guerrilla/terrorists, and the Army.

Of these three the Army is the only group, now or in the foreseeable future, with sufficient national power and organization to be able to undertake successfully the forcible restructuring of the political system. What the Army still lacks to play this role is unity of will and purpose. There are indications that this unity is developing, as cited earlier, but the biggest imponderable today is how extensive is the belief within the

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Army that it must take over and change the political system to save the country, and how fast that mentality is growing.

For this reason, it may be a mistake to see the sudden seizures of power by the military in Brazil, Peru, and Chile and their subsequent, almost immediate, implantation of far reaching authoritarian rule as the model for the probable course of events in Argentina. It is likely to happen more slowly in Argentina, in two or more stages rather than in a single move. Thus, one possible scenario is for Mrs. Peron to be removed in favor of a civilian successor, who will also be unable to control events; for a still divided military subsequently to take over in an ostensibly temporary capacity to attempt to restore calm; and finally, when traditional techniques have worked neither for the civilians nor the military, and, as violence and economic disorder continue to escalate, for a "hardline mentality" to rise to dominate the Army. At that point, either the current Army leadership would be forced to impose harsh, authoritarian rule or a new generation of Army officers, increasingly unfettered by the constraints and divisions of the past, would probably remove them and impose it in their place.

Whatever the exact scenario, the conditions seem ripe for permanent changes in the Argentine political system. New political forces have emerged and are having a heavy impact on the traditional political forces, political and economic problems have assumed proportions that will not long admit to temporizing or inaction, and the basic value consensus that made the old system possible has probably broken down. To monitor the likelihood of basic and far-reaching changes in Argentina (and their implications for US interests) continued scrutiny of the attitudes of military officers at the middle as well as top ranks will be required.

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